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**Testimony in support of: HB 1097 *Creating a Special Services Endorsement for School Nurses***

Thank you to the Chairs of Education, Representative Currey and Senator McCrory, and Committee Members for the opportunity to testify in favor of creating a Special Services Endorsement for school nurses. This concept has been a long time coming. I'm proud to be a voice for Connecticut school nurses.

School nursing is a professional nursing specialty evolving from the outdated notion that school nursing is limited to putting on band aids and doing lice checks. That is far from reality and my testimony will support the need for creation of a Special Services Endorsement to prepare nurses for the demands of health care in school in 2023.

41 years have passed with no change to CGS 10- 212-2 1982 regulations for school nurses

<https://statepolicies.nasbe.org/health/categories/health-services/school-nurse-qualifications/connecticut>.

School health has changed drastically from the days when special needs children were educated in separate schools. Inclusion altered the school environment. Advances in healthcare save preemie babies who would not have survived in the past. Medical advances allow children to survive, thrive and attend school.

Progress in medications and technology for diabetes, cardiac conditions, seizure disorders and more require nursing intervention to keep children "in school, in class and ready to learn."

Diabetic treatments and pumps keep changing. The school nurse must keep up with changes and the unique protocol for each child. Portable EKG's and telehealth monitor cardiac conditions. Pacemakers and implantable defibrillators may be used. Vagus Nerve Stimulation or Responsive Neurostimulation are implantable devices designed to prevent or lessen seizures.

Addressing the health care of every child with a health condition, not limited to the examples above, is only a part of what the school nurse must know and be able to do. The bigger challenge for the school nurse is how to integrate health care in a school setting. How to provide care with the least impact on class time, how to serve on the Special Education team by including health care needs in the Individualized Educational Plan, a plan that will vary from child to child with the same diagnosis. In the 1990's schools became aware of a different plan for students who did not have learning needs but had physical or emotional needs requiring accommodations. 504 added a new layer for school nurses related to the obligation to accommodate children in school.

School nurses not only plan for the school day; add before and after school programs, field trips, transportation, international trips, sports... The scope of responsibility to include all children in school related activities demands that school nurses maintain an awareness of individual needs and laws to include everyone.

Which brings us to support for a Special Services Endorsement. For all school nurses to obtain equality with the rest of school professional staff, the process is to create a special services

endorsement. That endorsement is the only one recognized by CSDE. It is the only one that recognizes nurses as certified staff just like social workers and other support staff.

There are so many differences in how nurses are prepared to be school nurses ranging from very little on the job training to a variety of orientation methods. The goal of a Special Services Endorsement is to create a standardized program that prepares nurses to work in school; something that doesn't exist now. The goal is to create a standard of preparation for all school nurses, regardless of the employer, so that nurses are both clinically able to work in schools as well as knowledgeable regarding school law and regulations.

Would a teacher be hired to work without formal training to teach? As the teachers on this Committee know, teachers are trained to teach before they start working. No school professional is allowed to work in school without proper education and a specified experience in school. Why is the same standard not applied to school nurses?

### **What Will Special Services Endorsement Do For School Nurses?**


Special Services Endorsement will:

1. Create a standard of preparation for the role of school nurse. Currently there is no program, pre-service, internship or comprehensive orientation for nurses entering schools. Nurses have no experience or knowledge related to providing health services in a school environment. There is no relationship with educational law, special education or 504 disability plans.
2. Will offer professional equity to school nurses by placing them in the same category as all other licensed school professionals (Social workers, Speech and language, psychologists, guidance counselors). Nurses are classified as “Non-Certified” staff which create barriers with professional development and as recognized interdisciplinary school team members.
3. Will clarify criteria for hiring by defining requirements for school nurses.
4. Will result in an outcome of a well prepared, highly qualified professional work force capable of a high level of service to students, staff, administration, and districts. Highly qualified school nurses can more successfully function within the laws and regulations specific to educational settings. Practicing in an educational setting versus a medical environment requires a unique scope where education is the primary focus. With one foot in health and one foot in education, school nurses are unique practitioners. It is well beyond time to change regulations written in 1982 (41 years ago) to meet the increasingly complex needs of a diverse student population in an ever changing environment.

It is, and has been, the recommendation of the School Nurse Advisory Council (SNAC) to see the 1982 regulations change. See 2023 recommendations from SNAC on pages 4-6.

Recommendations include:

- **Revise regulations written in 1982 to include entry level requirements for school nurses as a Bachelor of Science in Nursing or a related field.**
- **Nurses entering without a Bachelor degree will have 5 years to gain the degree.**
- **Nurses currently serving as school nurses will be grandfathered in.**
- **Create a Special Services Endorsement for school nurses.**

Special Services Endorsement Classified as Certified staff	No Special Services Endorsement Classified as Non-Certified staff
Speech and Language Pathologist (#061) School Counselor (#068) School Psychologist (#070) School Social Worker (#071) School Nurse-Teacher (#072) (primarily for teaching certified nursing aide classes) School Dental Hygienist-Teacher (#073)	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>School Nurses</b></p> </div>
<a href="http://www.ct.gov/sde/sde/01tableofcontents.htm">What are special services endorsements (ct.gov)</a>	

**It is time to change school nurses to Certified staff** School social workers, speech and language pathologists, psychologists, and counselors are licensed by the Department of Public Health as well as certified by the State Department of Education. It is time for school nurses to be afforded the same opportunity for a Special Services Endorsement and certification by the State Department of Education as their professional colleagues (see table above). It will take at least 3-5 years to create a higher education curriculum and practicum (internship) so that nurses, districts and employers have time to adjust. The goal is to make school nursing attractive to nurses and develop a pathway for them to become school nurses with the benefits of all other professional staff.

We realize that VNA's, Health Departments and towns aren't sure how or where they fit. That is a portion of the work to be done. I know we can work together to elevate school nurses to where they belong as health professionals in school.

Collaboration with all stakeholders to develop an appropriate program with a practicum, curriculum, and measurable outcomes is recommended. We recognize that a program currently does not exist for preparing school nurses for a Special Services Endorsement. Connecticut state universities have been contacted to collaborate on the feasibility of creating such programs. School nurses support instruction and academic success. Diversity in the student population, more students with complex health care needs, and increasing responsibilities challenge school nurses. Advanced education for school nurses is a critical contributor toward achievement of the goals of Connecticut schools.

25 states require certification or a special services certificate. 4 are optional. All New England states require some form of state certification except Connecticut. We urge you to support HB 1097 for the benefit of school nurses, school districts, and most importantly, Connecticut's children.

Respectfully submitted,

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Director of Health Services  
Branford Public Schools

# **Recommendations of the Connecticut School Nurse Advisory Council January 2023**

ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL NURSES  
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- IV. Protocols for Emergency Medication

## **Background and Purpose of Report**

Section one of Public Act No. 13-187, *An Act Concerning a School Nurse Advisory Council and An Advisory Council on Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorder Associated with Streptococcal Infections*, effective July 1, 2013 established the School Nurse Advisory Council. The Council makes recommendations to the Commissioners of Public Health and Education and the joint standing committees of the General Assembly on matters related to education and public health including (1) professional development for school nurses; (2) school nurse staffing levels; (3) the delivery of health care services by school nurses in schools and other matters that affect school nurses; (4) protocols for Emergency Medication Administration; and (5) protocols for evaluating certain temporary medical conditions that may be symptomatic of serious illnesses or injuries.

The Council is in its ninth year and meets monthly from September to January and once at legislative session end. Annual reports are submitted to Co-Chairs of Education and Public Health and Commissioners of State Department of Education and Public Health.

Schools in Connecticut are under local control, resulting in school health services, school nurse professional development, staffing levels and health services that vary from district to district. Members of the Council gave careful deliberation to the needs of districts in Connecticut and to state and national regulations, guidelines, and best practices.

#### **Recommendations from 2023 are:**

- American Federation of Teachers, Connecticut, AFL-CIO- support
- Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE)- no position
- Association of School Nurses of Connecticut (ASNC) -support

- Connecticut Association for Health Care at Home-support
- Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS)- no support
- Connecticut Nurses Association (CNA)- support
- Connecticut Federation of School Administrators -support
- Connecticut Chapter of The American Academy of Pediatrics- support

## Recommendations

- I. Professional Development and Qualifications for School Nurses Professional Development: Professionals in all fields must participate in professional development to remain current. Changes in professional development for other professional staff in school requires district level professional development offerings. There are a variety of ways for districts to offer school nurses professional development such as nurse driven professional development, networking opportunities, online education, and inclusion in interdisciplinary offerings provided by Boards of Education. It is imperative for school nurses to access quality professional development to remain current with evolving health and educational standards. CGS10-212-a *Qualifications for School Nurses*, dated 1982, require school nurses to participate in a minimum of 10 hours of professional development every two years. Proposed recommendation for professional development: **increase continuing education from 10 hours every two years to 15 hours every two years commencing July 1, 2023.**

### Qualifications:

40 years have passed with no revisions to the 1982 regulations for school nurses. It is, and has been, the recommendation of this Council to see the 1982 regulations change.

<https://statepolicies.nasbe.org/health/categories/health-services/school-nurse-qualifications/connecticut>

Recommendations related to CGS 10-212 are: **revise regulations written in 1982 to include entry level requirement for school nurses as a Bachelor of Science in Nursing or a related field. Nurses entering without a Bachelor degree will have 5 years to gain the degree. Nurses currently serving as school nurses will be grandfathered.**

**Recommendations also include creating a Special Services Endorsement for school nurses equal to social workers, speech and language pathologists, psychologists, guidance counselors etc.** School social workers, speech and language pathologists, psychologists, and counselors are licensed by the Department of Public Health as well as certified by the State Department of Education. It is time for school nurses to be afforded the same opportunity for certification by the State Department of Education as their professional colleagues. Collaboration with all stakeholders to develop an appropriate program with a practicum, curriculum, and measurable outcomes is recommended.

Children in Connecticut schools deserve highly qualified school nurses managing their health care needs. Over 50% of school nurses and school nurse supervisors currently have a Bachelor degree; others hold a Master degree or higher.

School nurses support instruction and academic success. Diversity in the student population, more students with complex health care needs, and increasing responsibilities challenge school nurses. Advanced education for school nurses is a critical contributor toward achievement of the goals of Connecticut schools.

- II. **School Nurse Staffing Recommendations**

TBD for 2024-25 recommendations.

- III. **The Delivery of Health Care Services by School Nurses in Schools and Other Matters that Affect School Nurses**

The number of children getting immunized has gone down and the number of exemptions has gone up. Reduction in herd immunity due to decreasing vaccine rates is a concern.

The Council supports maintaining the law related to medical exemptions. The Council does not support moral and philosophical exemptions.

- IV. **Protocols for Emergency Medication Administration**

No recommendations at this time.

**Summary of recommendations:**

**Section I. Professional Development and Requirements for School Nurses**

- a. **Revise regulations written in 1982 CGS 10-212- Bachelor of Science in Nursing or related field**  
**Nurses entering without a Bachelor degree will have 5 years to gain the degree.**
- b. **Increase continuing education from 10 hours every two years to 15 hours every two years provided by the local Board of Education commencing July 1, 2023.**
- c. **Begin the process for a Special Services Endorsement for School Nurses from SDE with consideration for Health Departments, Agencies, Towns etc. employing school nurses.**

**Section III.**

**Maintain Medical Exemptions for vaccines- no support for moral and philosophical exemptions.**

Recognition is given to members of the Council and those who review this document for their dedication and efforts on behalf of the school health and Connecticut's children.

Submitted to:

Co-chairs of Education Committee

Co-chairs of Public Health

Commissioner of Education SDE

Commissioner of Public Health DPH

Respectfully submitted by,

*Donna Kosiorowski* MS RN NCSN

*Verna Bernard Jones* MS RN NCSN

Co-Chairs School Nurse Advisory Council

*NOTE: Defined in the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015), the term 'specialized instructional support personnel' means- "(i) school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists; and "(ii) other qualified professional personnel, such as school nurses, speech language pathologists, and school librarians, involved in providing assessment, diagnosis, counseling, educational, therapeutic, and other necessary services (including related services as that term is defined in section 602 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. 1401) as part of a comprehensive program to meet student needs."*